

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

History

Ancient Olympics

The Olympic Games started in **Ancient Greece** about **2,800 years ago**. They took place in the city of Olympia **every four years**. There was a famous **temple of Zeus**. Men from every part of Greece came there and took part in sports competitions to **show their respect for Zeus**. There were many other similar competitions in Ancient Greece but the Olympic Games were the most important of all.

The first recorded Olympic Games took place in **776 BC**. They were only **one day long**. At the beginning, there was only **one discipline**. The athletes had to run about **200 metres** as fast as they could. The first Olympic Games winner whose name we know was a man called **Coroebus**. The Olympic Games were **only for men**. Married women couldn't even watch. There was a **special festival for young women** called the **Heraean Games**.

Later, the Olympic Games became longer. There were more events – **more running races, chariot races, jumping, throwing, and fighting**. Winners didn't get medals but they got **olive branches** that they could wear at the winners' ceremony. The winners became very famous and people gave them money or houses.

The first stadium was built in Olympia in the middle of the sixth century BC. The place slowly turned into a **small city**. There were stadiums, a swimming pool, a gym, a hotel for visitors, and other things. At the centre of Olympia there was a **temple of Zeus**. A **fire burned in the temple** from the beginning until the end of the Games.

The Olympic Games lasted for **more than 1,000 years**. They were **stopped in the 4th century by Emperor Theodosius**. He stopped them because he was a Christian and he didn't want to celebrate Zeus.

Modern Olympics

At the **end of the 19th century**, a Frenchman called **Pierre de Coubertin** decided to renew the Olympic tradition. He found people who agreed with him and they organized the first modern Olympic Games. The Games took place in **Athens in 1896**. They were more than 10 days long.

Only 241 athletes took part in the first modern Olympic Games. They came from 14 countries and they were **all men**. There were 43 events. The first event was **the triple jump**. An American called James Conolly won this event. The winner of every event got a **silver medal** and wore **olive branches** on his head.

The last event of these Olympic Games was special. The athletes ran **from Marathon to Athens**. It is **more than 40 kilometres**. In Ancient Greece, only one man ran this distance. His name was **Pheidippides**. After the battle of Marathon finished, he ran from Marathon to Athens to inform Athenians that **the Greeks had won against the Persians**. He arrived in Athens and shouted: "We are the winners!" Then he **collapsed and died**. Somebody thought it might be interesting to see if other people will die too if they run the same distance and a new sports event called the marathon was born. The first winner of this event was **Spyridon Louis** from Greece. When he finished, about 100,000 people watched him and cheered. He didn't die immediately after the run and continued to live for more than 40 years.

The **second Olympic Games** took place in **Paris in 1900**. They were about 5 months long. The **third Games** took place in **St Louis, USA**, and the **fourth Olympic Games** took place in **London**. Soon, the Olympic Games changed. They became **shorter and bigger**. Also, **women started taking part** in the Games.

Today, there are the **Summer Olympic Games** and the **Winter Olympic Games**. They take place **every four years**. In 2016, the Summer Olympic Games took place in **Rio de Janeiro** in Brazil. In 2018, the Winter Olympic Games took place in **Pyongchang**.

Symbols

The main symbol of the Olympics is the **Olympic flag**. The flag is white and there are **five interconnected circles** on it. Each circle **has a different colour**. There is a blue circle, a yellow circle, a black circle, a green circle, and a red circle. Each circle **represents one continent**.

The Olympic Games also have their own motto: **Citius, Altius, Fortius**. It is Latin for **Faster, Higher, Stronger**. Another symbol of the Olympics is the **fire** which is lit at the beginning of the Games. The fire is carried from Olympia in Greece to the place where the Olympic Games are taking place. There is also a special **Olympic anthem**.

Events

The Summer Olympics

At the first Olympic Games, there were just nine sports. Today, there are **about thirty**. Five sports have been part of every Summer Olympic Games since 1896: **athletics, cycling, fencing, gymnastics, and swimming**. Some other sports that are usually part of the Summer Olympics today are for example **football, basketball, volleyball, water polo, tennis, canoeing, archery, triathlon, weightlifting, rowing, sailing, judo**, and others. There are some sports that are not part of the Olympics but might get included in them in the future. Some candidates for new Olympic disciplines are for example **squash** or **bowling**.

The Winter Olympics

Winter Olympics are younger than Summer Olympics. The **first Winter Olympic Games** took place in **Chamonix, France** in **1924**. There are fewer disciplines in the Winter Olympic Games than in the Summer Olympic Games. Some of the most famous sports that are included in the Winter Olympic Games are **ice hockey, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, figure skating, speed skating, bobsleigh, curling**, and others.

Famous Athletes

Many sportsmen have become famous because of their Olympic performances. Here are just a few of the most famous ones. There are no Czech sportsmen in this overview because they are described elsewhere. Some of the most famous Czech Olympians are **Emil Zátopek, Věra Čáslavská, Jan Železný, Kateřina Neumannová, Martina Sáblíková, Ester Ledecká**, and others.

Spyridon Louis

Spyridon Louis was the **marathon winner** in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens. He was **Greek** and he became a national hero. His time was 2 hours 58 minutes and 50 seconds. When he entered the stadium, everybody clapped and the Greek crown prince Constantine joined him on the final lap.

Jesse Owens

Jesse Owens was the main star of the **Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936**. The Nazis used the Games as propaganda for their regime. They laughed at the black athletes in the American team. Jesse Owens was a **black American runner and jumper**. He won **four gold medals**, broke **two Olympic records** and showed everybody that the Nazis were fools.

Nadia Comăneci

Nadia Comăneci /komaneči/ is a famous **Romanian gymnast**. She was the first athlete who was awarded **the perfect score of 10 points**. She won **five gold** medals, **three silver** medals, and **one bronze** medal. She was named a Hero of Socialist Labour by her Bolshevik homeland. What an honour! In 1989, she escaped from Romania to the United States.

Michael Phelps

Michael Phelps is an **American swimmer**. He is **the most successful Olympian of all time**. He won **28 Olympic medals**. 23 of them were gold, 3 were silver and 2 were bronze. He is often considered **the best swimmer of all time**. He holds many world records and looks like a model. Doesn't it just make you hate the bastard?

Usain Bolt

Usain Bolt is a **Jamaican sprinter**. He has won **nine Olympic Gold medals** and he is the **record holder for 100 metres and 200 metres**. Because of his speed, the journalists nicknamed him the **Lightning Bolt**. He has a special pose that he uses before the race and after winning.

The Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Games are like the Olympic Games but for **disabled people**. The man who had the idea of a special games for disabled people was Dr **Ludwig Guttmann**. When the Olympic Games were taking place in London in 1948, he organized **an archery competition for wheelchair users**. This competition took place again in 1952 and in **1960**, the **first Paralympic Games** took place in **Rome**.

At the beginning, the Paralympic Games were **only for wheelchair users**. In 1976, people who had **bad eyes** and people who had **only one arm or one leg** competed for the first time. The first **Winter Paralympic Games** also took place in 1976. There are different events for people with different disabilities.

Problems

There are many issues connected with the Olympic Games. The best-known problem is probably **doping**. Some athletes want to win so much that they start taking **drugs that make them faster and stronger**. However, these drugs are very **dangerous** and can **destroy your health permanently**. That is why they are **banned**. If somebody is caught using these drugs, they cannot compete in the Games any more and their medals are taken away from them.

One of the most famous Olympic dopers is the Canadian sprinter **Ben Johnson**. In former **East Germany**, doping was even **organized by the state**. The communist dictatorship wanted to have more prestige in the world so doctors gave the athletes forbidden drugs, sometimes without their knowledge. In 2018, **Russia could not take part in the Olympic Games** in Pyeongchang because of its doping scandals. Russian athletes who have always tested clean could take part in the Games but under the Olympic flag.

Another problem is the **misuse of the Olympic Games for political reasons**. In 1936, the Games took place in **Nazi Germany**. The Nazis use the Games as an opportunity to promote their ideas and to make their regime look normal. The **Chinese Communist Party** used the 2008 Olympics in Beijing in a similar way.

Interesting stories

There are many curious and interesting stories connected with the Olympic Games. Here are just a few of them.

Fred Lorz

Fred Lorz won the **marathon** in the **1904 Olympic Games in Saint Louis**. When the daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt wanted to give him the gold medal, the ceremony was stopped. People found out that he had travelled about **11 miles in a car**.

Vanderlei de Lima

Vanderlei de Lima is a **Brazilian marathon runner**. He took part in the **2004 Athens Olympic Games**. He was leading the race and the finishing line was not very far away when he was **attacked by a crazy man**. He recovered and continued running. He finished **third**.

Lawrence Lemieux

Lawrence Lemieux is a **Canadian sailor**. He took part in the **1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games** and in the **1988 Seoul Olympic Games**. In Seoul, he **rescued two Singaporean sailors** who fell into the water. He didn't win any medals but he got a **special medal for fair play**.

The Paralympic scandal

The **greatest scandal** in the history of the Paralympic Games took place in **Sydney** in **2000**. The **Spanish basketball team** won the competition but they had to return the medals because **most of the team members were not disabled**. They just pretended to be mentally disabled so they could compete and win. After that, Olympic events for intellectually disabled people were stopped for some time.

Barefoot marathon

Abebe Bikila from **Ethiopia** won the **marathon** in the **1960 Olympic Games in Rome**. He was the **first East African** who won the marathon (but he definitely was not the last). The really surprising thing was that **he wasn't wearing any shoes during the race**. He was used to running barefoot and the shoes that his coach gave him caused him pain so he took them off. He won again four years later in Tokyo but this time he put on some shoes.

Broken knee

Japanese gymnasts were the **best in the world** but gymnasts from the **Soviet Union** were **close behind them**. One Japanese gymnast, Shun Fujimoto, **broke his leg** during his performance. He felt horrible pain but he **didn't tell anybody and continued**. He won the **gold medal**. Only then he told everybody what had happened to him. When they later asked him if he would do it again, he said no.

The overview is largely based on the following sources:

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